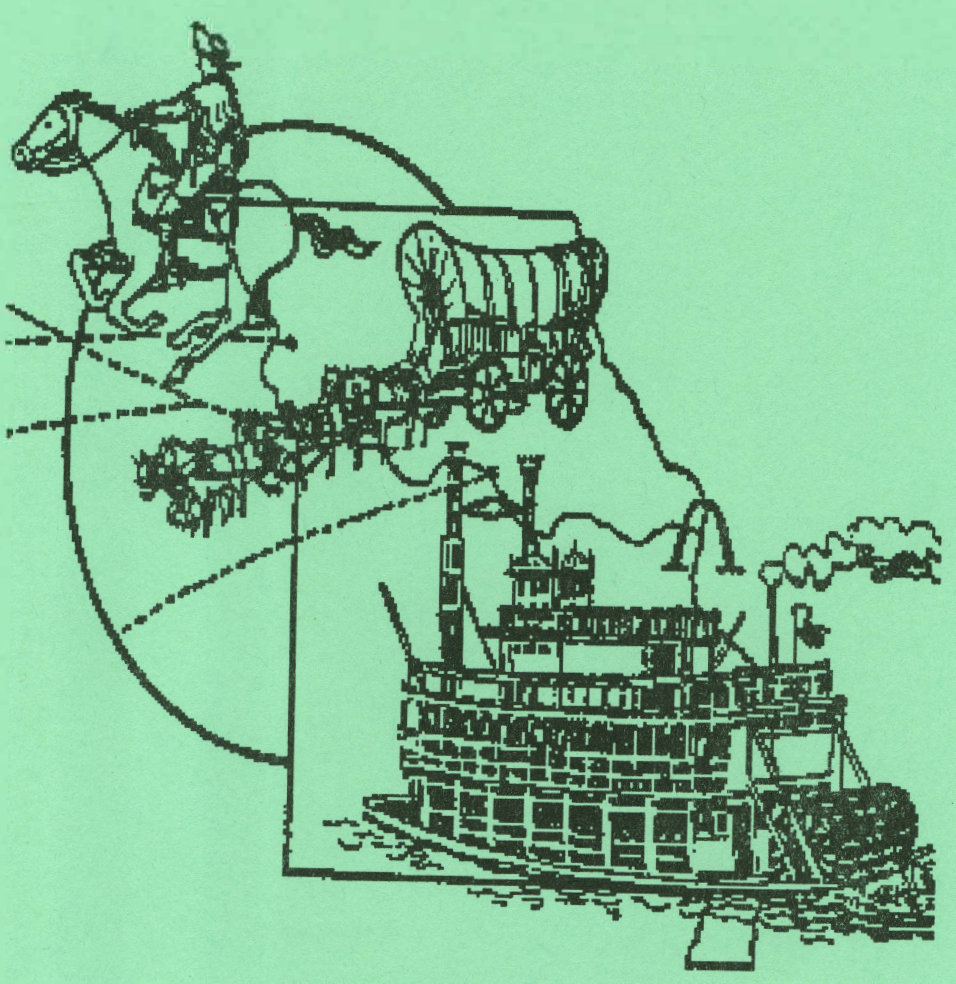

# Toward The Setting Sun

*2nd Series*, Vol. 7, No. 2 Spring 2009

# *TOWARD THE SETTING SUN*

*The Historical Journal of the Missouri Conference*

*The United Methodist Church*

*Second Series*

Volume 7, No. 2 Spring 2009

# Table Of Contents

Andrew Monroe's Notes of Travels with Bishop McKendree ..... 1

The Field and the Laborers ..... 7
J.E. Godbey

And Are We Yet Alive? Reflections on Conference ..... 11
John O. Gooch

Index to Toward The Setting Sun, Second Series ..... 17

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome, once again, to the pages of *Toward the Setting Sun.* It's been a long journey since that first issue, back in 1982. Of course, for several years there was no journal, because of the illnesses and deaths of several editors who took over when I moved to Nashville. In fact, when I returned to Missouri and offered to take up the task again, members of the commission said, "you do realize that the last several editors have all died?" So far, that hasn't happened to me, though it will some day.

In the meantime, I get to keep doing what I love – history, the church, and writing about both. It is a unique privilege to be the editor of *Toward the Setting Sun.* At times it is also a frustration. This is one of those times, when we are experiencing a drought in materials. That's why you see reprints of older documents in this issue. Writing for this journal does not require a great scholarly work, though we'd love to have those also. What is requires is a good story about United Methodism and its predecessors in this state. We haven't begun to tap all the stories that are out there. Please help us do that. If you'd like to write, but don't really know how to pick a topic or find research materials, let me know. I can help with that. I have a wish list of topics and we have a treasure trove of sources in our archives at Central Methodist University.

In the meantime, enjoy this issue. Think about a contribution you could make. If you can't write, find us a few more subscribers among your friends and fellow church members. That would gladden the hearts of all of us who worry about budgets. If you have ideas, let me know. My email is jogooch@aol.com. I'd love to hear from you

# The Rev. Andrew Monroe's Notes Of Travel With Bishop McKendree

In our last issue, we published some excerpts from *The Recollections of Andrew Monroe.* The first part of those ended with Monroe riding to meet Bishop McKendree, to accompany the aged and ill bishop to Baltimore. At that point, we said that it was a shame Monroe didn't record the trip and the General Conference of 1820, which was the ultimate destination. After the fall issue went to the printer, your editor discovered Monroe's account of the journey, printed in Robert Paine's book, *Life and Times of William McKendree, Volume II.* (Nashville: The Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1890.) This gives us a clear idea of what life was like for frontier preachers in the early 1800s.

> At the Nashville Conference, held in the autumn of 1819, I was appointed to the charge of the Bowling Green Circuit, Kentucky. About the middle of February, I received a note from Bishop McKendree, written from his brother's, Dr. James McKendree, near Fountain Head, Sumner County, Tennessee, where he had for some time made his home. He requested me to make ready and repair to his quarters, to accompany him to the city of Washington. The Bishop had been long in bad health, and was still very feeble; so much so, that his friends remonstrated against his undertaking the journey. The winter was open and wet, making the roads almost im-passible; besides this, we were going on horseback, which would have been a severe tour for one in the vigor of life and health; but the Bishop's heart was set upon meeting the preachers of the Baltimore Conference, which was to meet in Georgetown, District of Columbia, and neither bad health, nor intolerable roads could intimidate that extraordinary man of God. Getting a supply for my place, I made ready, and in a few days met the Bishop, who was buoyant in spirit and full of resolution. He was provided with the necessary fixtures – riding-horse, pack-horse, etc., – for the journey. We spent the first Sabbath together at Salem. The venerable Valentine Cook had come there to have what he supposed would be the last interview with the Bishop. Cook preached and the Bishop exhorted. Our stopping place was Brother

Cryer's. We left Monday morning, Brother Cook accompanying us. We traveled about twenty miles through mud and rain, and stopped for the night at the house of a friend. I found by this time that my position would subject me to much responsibility and toil, and that my duties were of a very delicate character; but still I considered the society of the Bishop to be more than a remuneration. Tuesday morning we parted reluctantly with our venerable friend, Brother C., and proceeded on our journey. Nothing of special note occurred during the week. We averaged about twenty miles per day. At this rate of traveling the Bishop was often so fatigued as to need help in dismounting; but in the morning he was ready for breakfast by candlelight and the first to mount his horse. Although he always desired early breakfast, he never failed (whether at a public or private house) to have religious worship. This he made a part of his duty, either for night or at noon for dinner. I remember but one instance in the entire journey of leaving a house without prayers, and that was at a large hotel at Orange Courthouse.

We arrived Saturday evening at an old acquaintance of the Bishop's, who lived a short distance from Kingston; remained with him overnight; rode into town in the morning, and stopped with Brother Richards, who kept a hotel at the time. I think he was a local preacher.

Here we met the Rev. Benjamin Edge, preacher in charge. The Bishop preached a short sermon at eleven o'clock from 2 Peter I.10. The discourse was doctrinal and argumentative. In it he gave predestination no quarter. I tried to preach at night in the hearing of the Bishop, which was a great trial to me. Here I saw his tenacity for rule severely tried. A local preacher had come from a distant part of the circuit, who claimed to have a certificate of election to Deacons' orders; but as he had no expectation of meeting the Bishop, his paper was left at home. Brother E. was present at his election, and joined him in requesting the Bishop to ordain him. At first, he positively refused, and repelled every argument until Monday morning, when he reluctantly yielded to their importunity, and ordained him, after which we started on our journey. The weather was warm, and the mud still deep.

In this connection, I will mention an incident which brings out one trait in the Bishop's character. We had been detained far beyond the usual time of starting; he had been worried, and his patience much tried. I was perplexed in getting off, and forgot his canister of bark.[1] After traveling about half a mile, he inquired if I had put it up, when I answered in the negative. He reined in his horse, took the led-horse from me without saying a word, but in any thing but a pleasant manner. I returned imme-diately, and getting the forgotten medicine, soon overtook him. We traveled for several miles without speaking; *he* finally broke silence by remaking that, from long sickness and fatigue of the journey, he had become impatient; that he did not know how I bore with him; but if I would forgive him, he would try to do better. That, of course, was an end to the difficulty. He considered it noble to confess a fault; and his manner was so child-like and sincere, that it was a perfect cordial to the wounded spirit. He complained more that day than usual; stopped with an old friend some time before night; suffered much during the night from asthma, but was ready to renew the journey at an early hour the next day.

. . . . . .

After breakfast, and the payment of a moderate bill, we went on our weary way twenty miles, through the deep mud, to Orange Court-house, where we stopped at Brother MacCormick's. Most kindly did they receive the Bishop and his traveling companion – for in this way he always introduced me. We had a pleasant time. A conversation occurred, in the course of the evening, which may interest some of my readers, as it did me at the time. It shows the state of things in Virginia in 1820.

Mr. McCormick was complaining of the want of an adequate supply of preachers. He said, "We have not enough, and then many of the charges are in the hands of young, inexperienced men." He said that other denominations had the advantage of ours. The Bishop listened attentively to his complaint, and then, in a tone and manner of his own, replied, "It is your own fault – I mean the fault of you Methodists." All seemed surprised and Brother McCormick inquired,

[1] The reference to "bark" is probably to what was known as "Peruvian bark," now known to science as a source of quinine. This leads one to suspect that the Bishop suffered from malaria, among other things.

"How so?" "Well," said he, "the preachers marry, as they have a right to do; then you drive them from the field, by withholding a support."

I learned from the conversation that there was a great opposition to married preachers, and also, that although the Bishop was an old bachelor, he was a friend of the married preachers and their families.

We remained at Orange until Tuesday, when we went on as far as Fauquier, where the Bishop, at the earnest entreaties of his friends, preached, to a congregation hastily gotten up, a most admirable discourse, holding his delighted hearers spell-bound for almost forty minutes. His theme was "God's love and faithfulness to his children." He had recently passed through the crucible, and was prepared to speak from experience. He illustrated the providence and promises of God with remarkable clearness, and applied them with power.

The next morning we continued our journey. The Bishop's health was somewhat improved, and as we approached nearer our destination, he became more buoyant. I think it was Thursday, a little after noon, when we reached the Potomac Bridge. Such a bridge, across such a sheet of water, was to me a grand and novel sight. But the scene was characterized by two incidents: the first was the terror that seized our horses – they were so frightened as to give us strong grounds for fear on our part; the second was a sudden snow-storm, which met us with great violence midway on the bridge – we were quite enveloped for some moments, so that we could see no land. While in the midst of danger, I could but ask the question, Have we been preserved in this long journey, to perish in sight of the destined point? But thanks and praise to Him who "directs the whirlwind and guides the storm," the violence was soon over, and we arrived safe on land. The Bishop knew where the Conference held its sessions, in Georgetown; so we bent our way immediately to the place, and alighting from the carriage, he left the horses to my care, and without notice presented himself in their midst. He was received as one from the dead – many not expecting to see him this side of eternity. After many saluta-tions and much rejoicing, we were conducted to the residence of Mr. Foxhall, one of the Bishop's old and tried friends, where we had our quarters. He met the Conference that evening, and addressed the body in an

interesting and affectionate manner. The subjects that principally occupied his mind, and of which he conversed freely with the preachers and prominent members of the Church, were the missionary cause generally and the Indian missions in particular. Another was the principles of Church-law and polity – the power of the ministry and the rights of the membership, as secured by constitutional law. He also deprecated what he considered a tendency to congregational, or local, Methodism. He was very cheerful – seemed thankful that he had been preserved through the toils and dangers of his long journey, and addressed himself faithfully to the discharge of his duties, being the promotion of the permanent interests of the great missionary enterprise. The Bishop had come to the city clad in Tennessee jean, not by any means of the finest quality. This, of course, the city folks could not endure; so, in a very short time, he was presented with a full suit of fine black broadcloth. I remember that he seemed slow to make the change, and when in the act of doing it, he remarked to me, "I am afraid of fine things; fine things delude the soul." Many ordinary Christians boast that they are not afraid of finery; yet this great man of God, past his three-score years, was afraid of its influence, because he was acquainted with the deceitfulness of sin and the wiles of the devil. These were points that he had studied most thoroughly, as every minister and Christian ought to do.

Although we had many difficulties, owing to the Bishop's deep-seated infirmities, the weight of care which continually pressed upon his head and heart, the rain, mud, and mire, and the horses' being badly adapted to the service, still we had cause to be thankful for our health and safe arrival."

## THE FIELD AND THE LABORERS

*J.E. GODBEY*

The pioneer itinerant preached almost every day upon his long journeys. Take this illustration from the diary of John Scripps, who describes the round which he and another preacher made with Jesse Walker on his district (the Illinois District) in 1812, which then included the Missouri work.[2]

> On Monday, the 18th, Jesse Walker, J. Patterson and myself set out for the Massac camp meeting, to be held at the Rock and Cave, on the Ohio River. We traveled this day in an easterly direction, through a generally uninhabited country and almost pathless woods, thirty-two miles to Thomas Standard's, where a congregation, previously notified, awaited our arrival. The exercises of the evening were thrillingly interesting and continued until midnight. About noon the next day, we separated, still tending onward in devious paths, to hold night meetings six or eight miles apart, to meet the next day, probably again to part for the night, so as to hold as many meetings as our number and the location of the neighborhood would permit. On Friday, the 22nd, we reached the camp ground. Services commenced immediately upon our arrival and during the entire progress of the meeting we had precious seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, several conversions and many accessions to the Church. Brother J. Johnson was with us one night and preached for us. Brother Walker closed the services with an interesting discourse on Monday, but Monday night found him several miles on his way to the next appointment, again holding forth to a large congregation at Proctor's meetinghouse. But to particularize his labors would swell this account to too great an extent. Suffice it to say that crossing the big Wabash near its mouth, we descended the river in the territory of Indiana, crossed Black River, Patoka and White rivers to Brother Johnson's about twelve miles from Vincennes. The next Friday, April 29th, the quarterly meeting for Vincennes Circuit was held. It was a time of power and closed Monday morning. We made a short travel that day of six or eight miles and held a night meeting at Dr. Merrick's; the next day, noon, at Herrington's Tavern; at night, at Anthony Griffin's on Black River. We crossed the Wabash and commenced the Wabash quarterly meeting Friday, May 6, at Brother Hannah's, in a blockhouse, from which our next appointment as one hundred and seventy or eighty miles to the southwest across the Mississippi, in New Madrid Circuit, Missouri Territory, commencing Friday, the 13th. Thence sixty miles north to Cape Girardeau Circuit, May 20th.

At both these appointments, and all subsequent appointments through the summer, camp meetings were held, the necessity for which grew out of the fact that no one-room, or even two-room, log cabin (for we had no other sort of house) was capable

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[2] Remember that, in 1812, the United States was at war with Great Britain, though the war barely touched the Illinois country, or Missouri.

of entertaining one half, or even one-fourth of one of Jesse Walker's quarterly meetings, for his regular Sabbath congregations collected from far and near, from ten, twenty, and thirty miles around. From Cape Girardeau, Brother Walker proceeded by himself to hold a camp and quarterly meeting on Saline Circuit, commencing Friday, the 27th; on Meramec Circuit, June 3; Coldwater, June 10; Missouri Circuit the 17th – to which appointments, Following the circuitous route he had to travel, it was upward of two hundred miles north. And here, on Monday, June 20, he concluded his second round of meetings, about eighty miles northwest of home, and sixty from Goshen, the commencement of his round, where he again preached on returning to his family, there to enjoy a few days' respite, to repair his itinerant gear and prepare for the still more extensive operations of his summer campaign, under the more favorable auspices of shallow streams, better roads, longer days, and the sweltering fervor of a July sun. As respects the style of living of the early settlers, and the fare of the preachers, we have this note from John Scripps: Our nights were generally spent in one-room log cabins, which con- stituted our meetinghouse, kitchen, nursery, dining room, and bedroom, all in the space of sixteen feet square and, not infrequently, a loom occupying one-fourth of it, together with spinning wheels and other apparatus for manufacturing apparel – our congregations requiring our services until ten or twelve o'clock; our supper after dismissal. We have sometimes sat in the large fireplace, occupying the entire end of the cabin, and plucked from out the smoke of the chimney, pieces of dried and smoked venison, or jerk, the only provision the place could afford us. Our horses fared worse in muddy pens, or tied to saplings or corners of the cabin, regaled with the refuse of the winter's fodder, sometimes on seed corn, purchased in Kentucky at a dollar a bushel, and brought in small quantities, according to the circumstances of the purchaser, a hundred miles or more, at some expense and trouble. This, where they had it, in spite of our remon- strances, they would pound in mortars to make us bread. Beds were of various qualities, generally feather beds, but not infrequently fodder, shucks, straw, and, sometimes, only a deer skin, but always the best the house could afford, either spread on the puncheon floor, before the fire, from which we had to rise early to give room for the breakfast preparations, or on a patched-up platform attached to the wall, upon which the preacher would take his place, and which, not infrequently, would fall

down in the night, with its burden of three in a bed. Such incidents would occasion a little mirth, but we would soon fix it up and be asleep again.

One of the preachers describes the manner in which supper was prepared in the cabin after he had dismissed his congregation, at about eleven o'clock. The good wife seemed to have no cooking utensil but a small skillet. In this, she first baked the bread, then fried the meat, and finished the supper by making coffee in it.

The General Conference which was held in Baltimore, May 1816 formed the Missouri Conference with boundary as follows: "The Missouri Conference shall be bounded by the Ohio Conference on the north, by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on the east, and the Arkansas River on the South." There was no western boundary.[3] The delimitation here is quite vague. It included Indiana and Illinois and anything which might develop west of the Mississippi and north of the Arkansas River. But even the Arkansas River, as a southern boundary was not observed. At the second session of the conference, we find William Stevenson appointed to Hot Springs, which was sixty miles south of the Arkansas River and, in a little while, we find appointments of the Missouri Conference scattered all over Arkansas and the Indian Territory. But it must be remembered that Missouri Territory, which was formed in 1812, embraced all of the present state of Arkansas and that the southern part of Missouri was erected into the territory of Arkansas in 1819.

Of the development of the work in Arkansas, we give a few notes. The first circuit named in Arkansas was Spring River, so called from the stream which heads in Mammoth Spring near the town of Thayer on our southern border. Dr. Horace Jewell, author of "Methodism in Arkansas," tells us that this circuit was formed in 1815 and supplied by Eli Lindsey, who traveled extensively in North Arkansas. He relates how, while preaching in the cabin of Mr. Reid, where Batesville now stands, the service was suddenly turned into a bear chase. The bear was soon killed and the service resumed. Phillip David, whose name is already familiar to us among the Missouri preachers, was appointed to this circuit the next year at the first session of the Missouri Conference, and William Stevenson was sent to Hot Springs. We cannot follow the history of this part of the work. A few notes must suffice. In 1819, we find a Black River District in Arkansas; after two years the name is changed to Arkansas District. As presiding elders

[3] The fact there was no western boundary gave rise to the notion that the conference extended to the farthest cabin toward the setting sun.

of this district, we find the names of William Stevenson, John Scripps, Jesse Hale, and Uriel Haw, especially familiar to us in our early work in Missouri. Little Rock District appears in 1832 and the same year the Creek and Cherokee missions indicate the work among the Indians. In 1835 the Arkansas Conference was organized. It included Arkansas, North Louisiana, the Indian Territory and the Sulphur Fork country of Texas.

We may judge from the long distance which the Arkansas preachers had to travel to reach the session of the Missouri Conference that few of them attended. The conference for 1835, the year before the division, was held at Arrow Rock camp ground. A note from Dr. Hunter, in the Arkansas Methodist, says: "The only representative from the Arkansas part of the work was William P. Ratcliffe, a young man who had been transferred from Tennesse, and who had just closed his first year west of the river. His presiding elder had intrusted him with all his papers, and he made the journey of three or four hundred miles on horseback and discharged the duties imposed upon him as well as if he had been a veteran of a score of years." That was the last time that the work in Arkansas was represented on the floor of the Missouri Conference. The formation of the Illinois Conference in 1825 had taken from the Missouri Conference all of its territory east of the Mississippi River. The creation of the Arkansas Conference in 1835 limited its work southward to the southern line of the State. In 1844, the Indian Mission Conference was formed. After this, the Missouri Conference was almost wholly confined to the State of Missouri. The division of this territory into two conferences, one north and the other south of the Missouri River, came in 1845, and, in 1870 the part south of the Missouri River, called the St. Louis Conference, was divided, forming the Southwest Missouri Conference out of its western section.

# AND ARE WE YET ALIVE?
## REFLECTIONS ON CONFERENCE

*JOHN O. GOOCH*

Meetings of United Methodist conferences have traditionally begun with the singing of Charles Wesley's hymn, "And Are We Yet Alive?" In recent years, that tradition has been challenged on the ground that the hymn is no longer relevant to today's world. Instead of archaic hymns, we need music that will appeal to the needs of modern people. On the one hand, the challenge has merit. The hymn had great relevance in an earlier day, when conference was restricted to traveling elders and probationers, and there was always uncertainty that one's partners in the covenant would even be alive when conference met next. On the other hand, the theology contained in the hymn still has a great deal to say to today's church. In this essay, we will examine the changing nature of the annual conference and ask how the hymn could still speak to us today. This is in no way a scholarly examination, but a reflection of the author's experiences and of the value of that particular hymn as a theological document for our day.

Russell Richey has written an important book on the Methodist Conference in which he argues that the purposes of the conference were "polity, fraternity, and revival."[4] Polity determined fraternity, in that the conference decided who would be admitted as itinerant elder. Since (in the beginning) the itinerant elders were the people who made up the conference, the decision of who to admit (and who to discontinue) had profound implications for fraternity. Fraternity, in turn, was a descriptive term for the fellowship among the preachers. They considered each other as family, rejoiced when they came together, and wept when it was time to part and return to their circuits. When a preacher located for whatever reason, he was dropped from the conference. Only traveling preachers could be members of the conference. This threatened fraternity in that men (and they were all men, in the early days) who had been a cherished part of the fraternity were suddenly no longer there. In fact, this threat to fraternity was a bone of contention in the General Conference for generations. Revival was an expected part of conference, at every level from the quarterly conference among the circuits to the General Conference. The meeting of the conference was a time for

[4] Russell E. Richey, The Methodist Conference in America. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996.

preaching, for camp meetings, for winning new converts. The preachers gladly joined together to make revival an important part of the conference. When few souls were won, the conference was considered less than successful, no matter what happened in the business sessions. Revival disappeared relatively early in the history of the conference, as more and more attention was paid to polity. A vestige of the emphasis on revival may be found in the practice of bishops and other church leaders preaching in the churches of the city where General Conference meets, but this hardly counts as an emphasis on revival.

Richey's analysis of conference is the context for our examination of Wesley's hymn, "And Are We Yet Alive?" and its relevance for the church today. Along the way, we will also consider how conference has changed over the centuries and what that might mean for our life today.

And are we yet alive, and see each other's face?
Glory and thanks to Jesus give, for his almighty grace.

When the earlier conferences met, one of the first things to happen was the welcoming of one's brothers, most of whom had not seen each other for a full year. They had been on lonely circuits, many of them in wilderness areas where there were wild animals, bandits, unfriendly Indians, poor food, poor shelter, extremes of weather, and miles between preaching appointments. It is no wonder that, when they came together, they sang, "And are we yet alive, and see other's face?" The reunion was important, but the hymn was also a great statement of faith and praise. "Glory and thanks to Jesus give, for his almighty grace." They knew they were together again because their God had kept them safe. It was grace that allowed them to see each other once again, and they gave thanks for that grace with great joy. Out of that joy, fraternity was strengthened and revival was begun. With conference spread across an entire state, could not the coming together again be a source of wonder, joy, and thanksgiving? What better way to express those emotions than the words of this traditional hymn?

Preserved by power divine to full salvation here,
Again in Jesus' praise we join and in his sight appear.

They were "preserved by power divine," not only to come together again, but also preserved to full salvation in this life. They were conscious, those preachers, of the

saving power of grace, and of the continuing call to "go on to perfection." That is the full salvation of which they sang. Out of the deep awareness of that salvation, that grace moving them on to sanctification, they sang the praises of Jesus. Conference was a wonderful time of renewal of faith. Conference was also "church" for the preachers. They were not members of a local church, they were members of conference. So, when they came together for the period set aside for conference – whether a few days at charge conference, a week or so at annual conference, or several weeks at General Conference, — they did what churches do. They worshipped, they took in new members (ordination), they memorialized their dead, they attended to the business of the church. This was part of the power of conference for the preachers. I remember well that, when I first became a member of the conference, the feeling that this was my local church was a powerful experience for me. When conference met, I got to go to "my" church for the only time all year. The services of ordination and memorial were special times for me because this was the one time all year I was allowed to participate in the life of my church. The persons being ordained were becoming members of my church. Those eulogized in the memorial service were members of my church that were with us no more. That feeling was a powerful boost for the ideal of fraternity as a part of conference as late as the 1960s.

With the 1970s and following decades, there was a great emphasis on "democratization" and "empowerment of the laity" in United Methodism. These were laudable goals and opened the general church to greater participation on the part of the laity, and a broader base of support for the decisions of conferences, both general and annual. But the blessings also brought a down-side, in that fraternity was slowly eaten away. No longer did the clergy feel the bonds of fraternity and joy in being together. Conference became so large that it was hard to even see fellow clergy, let alone enjoy fraternity. Ordination and admission of candidates into the conference became time-consuming matters about which the conference complained. To say that is not to express "sour grapes" because the things that mattered to me have been downplayed. Nor is that a longing for "the good old days." It is not. The good old days were often not that good. But it is a longing for the time when the itinerants, even in our modern electronic society, could meet face to face and enjoy the fellowship of being in church that had gone.

What troubles have we seen, what mighty conflicts past,
Fightings without and fears within, since we assembled last.

In the entire history of the United Methodist Church, and of The Methodist Church before it, there have been troubles, conflicts, fightings and fears. Some of those were external. Settlers were not always open to the preaching of the circuit riders. The Methodist preachers were considered to be Tories during the American Revolution (because many of them had come from England and loyalty to Wesley was considered to be equal to a loyalty to King George) and were often in danger of their lives because of that perception. They were certainly in danger from the environment, and from rogue Indians and white outlaws. Fighting was also internal. From the beginning, there were those who disagreed with Asbury and with the system of church leadership he set up. James O'Kelley led a group of preachers out of the church because he lost an attempt to have appointments appealed to conference. (One of the preachers he took with him was William McKendree, but Asbury soon won McKendree back.) The Methodist Protestants left because they didn't like bishops and did want laity to have a voice in the church. There was constant tension over the status of circuit riders who located and became local preachers. Were they still a part of the fraternity? If not, why not? Did that make them second-class citizens? Tension over slavery led to all sorts of fights within the church, as abolitionist groups gained power and southern preachers resisted their efforts to abolish slavery. Orange Scott and others led the Wesleyan Methodists out in 1840 over, among other things, the issue of slavery. Then, of course, there was the great split in 1844, and the literal fighting between the northern and southern branches of Methodism.

Because we are human, we will always disagree. Sometimes disagreements will lead to fights within and without the church. The civil rights movement and the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction certainly brought deep divisions to the surface in the 1960s. In our day, we have some of the same kinds of division over the rights of our gay and lesbian members, the ordination of gay persons, and related issues. We have had major theological differences. The most notable recent one was the uproar over the so-called "quadrilateral" of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This disagreement led to deep divisions within the United Methodist body.

Yet out of all the Lord hath brought us by his love;

And still he doth his help afford, and hides our life above.

In the heat of disagreement and argument, faced with threats both from outside and inside the fraternity, we tend to forget that the Lord always brings us "out of all" by love. In spite of the unlovely ways in which the church often operates, the Lord still loves us and calls us to love one another. God is still with us in our quarrels and disagreements, not leaving us to live with the consequences, but always helping and leading the church (at least, when we are open to that help). Fraternity is broken when we insist on being right, and don't consider the positions of those who disagree with us. With this broken fraternity (and here fraternity includes the laity as well as clergy), polity also breaks down. Because of disagreement, and even more because we often are so sure we're right, moving forward with legislation or other words to the church becomes impossible, largely because we aren't willing to seek a position in which all sides of a disagreement can find expression and hope.

Then let us make our boast of his redeeming power,
Which saves us to the uttermost, till we can sin no more.

When we can remember that the church belongs to God more than to us, when we remember we are called together by a loving God, when we rejoice to see our brothers and sisters after a time of separation – that is, when there is a spirit of fraternity among us when the conference convenes, then we focus on the ultimate reality about conference. It is not about our agendas. It is not about one-issue stands. It is not about how we can get enough votes for our position. It is about the redeeming power of God through Jesus Christ. The hymn reminds us of this in no uncertain terms. Let us boast in that power which saves us to the uttermost. This is the language of sanctification, the call to become in Christ everything that we have within us the capacity to become. It is about becoming perfect in love to God and neighbor. The call to perfection is not just for clergy alone in today's conference, though the candidates for conference membership are the ones who are specifically asked about perfection. The call comes to all members of the church, laity and clergy alike. I have often wondered what would happen if, at General Conference and at Annual Conference, all business was set aside, and the whole focus were on revival. If we had Bible studies and theological workshops on Christian perfection and what it means for us. If we had hours, not just a few minutes, set aside for prayer that we might "be made perfect in this

life." Would that lead to revival? Would God send new power on God's church? Would we ever have the courage to do that? And what might that do to and for the church of Jesus Christ in its particular manifestation as United Methodist?

Let us take up the cross till we the crown obtain,
And gladly reckon all things loss so we may Jesus gain.

A major part of the power of the hymn is in this stanza. Taking up the cross is an exercise in humility and spiritual discipline. It reminds us that the call of the Christian is not for glory or advancement, not for getting our own way, but for sacrificing for the sake of others. It is probably true that we don't "obtain the crown" unless we do take up the cross. By bearing the cross gladly, we give up all the things of the world – wealth, power, pride of place. That was the reality for the circuit riders in an earlier day. All they had was their horse and saddle and the few possessions they could carry with them on horse-back. They didn't have even honor and recognition for what they were doing. In fact, they were often jeered at by unruly crowds, and even physically assaulted. My guess would be that the knowledge of what they – and probably their peers – were suffering would be a strong link in the chain of fraternity. They gave up all joyfully, because by giving up the things of the world, they gained Jesus.

So what have we learned, in our look at changes in conference and the hymn? I hope we've learned that the hymn is not so old-fashioned and irrelevant as we thought. The first verse, or at least the opening lines, probably doesn't have as much relevance as it once did. But the rest of the hymn is rooted in United Methodist doctrine – the saving grace of Jesus Christ, the call to perfection, the grace of God which reaches out and calls us to love in all situations, the call to take up the cross, and the reminder of the great "prize" of our faith, life in heaven. The old realities of conference to which the hymn also appeals, are gone forever. Conference has changed and so must we. But the power of the hymn will always remain, so long as we are true to our doctrinal roots.

# TOWARD THE SETTING SUN
# INDEX, SECOND SERIES
# FALL, 2002 – SPRING 2009


**B**

Berry, Keith T., "Honor Roll of Black Churches in Missouri's United Methodist Heritage" ..... Fall, 2008
Bohn, Carol Ogdon, "Joining the East and West Conferences Into One" ..... Fall, 2008
Burleigh, Elaine, "Anatomy of a Schism" ..... Spring, 2007

**C**

Casey, Shannon, "Women's Struggle for Ordination in American Methodism" Spring, 2004
"Central Methodist University Honors Rev. Marjorie Casson" ..... Spring, 2005
Clark, Elmer T., "Early Methodism in Missouri" Spring, 2004

**D**

Detweiler,Richard J., "While the Storm Clouds Gather" ..... Spring, 2005

**F**

Finley, John D., "Women Methodist Clergy" ..... Fall, 2006
Fisher, Anna, Alex Smith, Lindsay Smith, "Youth Mission Choir toMozambique" ..... Spring, 2003

**G**

Godbold, Albea, "Enoch Mather Marvin, Dedicated Genius" ..... Spring, 2005
Godbey, J. E., "The Field and the Laborers" ..... Spring, 2009
Gooch, John O., "More Thoughts on John Clark" ..... Fall, 2002
"And Are We Yet Alive? Singing our History ..... Spring, 2005
"Methodism: Empire of the Spirit. A Book Review" ..... Fall, 2005
"A Man for Methodism's Season" ..... Spring, 2008
"And Are We Yet Alive? Reflections on Conference" ..... Spring, 2009

**H**

Hall, Claudia, "Early Circuits in Northwest Missouri, 1728 – 1844" ..... Fall, 2005
Hamer, Mary Ann, "A History of the Lewis Family" ..... Spring, 2008
Harrison, Charles, "A Review of 'John Wesley for the 21st Century" ..... Spring, 2008

**I**

Inman, Marianne, "Letter to Alumni and Friends" ..... Fall, 2004

**K**

Kottwitz, Cleo, "Jacob Lanius" ..... Fall, 2003
Kreamer, Carol P., "Covenant Evolves and Becomes Personal" ..... Spring, 2003

**L**

"Lanius' Appointments" ..... Fall, 2003

Lanius, Jacob, "Excerpts from His Journal" ..... Fall, 2003
W. M. Leftwich, "Church at Independence" ..... Fall, 2006
"Letters from Missionaries" ..... Fall, 2002
"Letters to Lanius" ..... Fall, 2003
Loper, Caren, "Keeping the Faith Through Song" ..... Spring, 2004

**M**

Milner, Jessica, "The Tragic Split in Episcopal Methodism, 1844 ..... Fall, 2002
Monroe, Andrew, "The Recollections of Andrew Monroe" ..... Fall, 2008
"The Rev. Andrew Monroe's Recollections of Travel With Bishop McKendree" Spring, 2009

**N**

Nichols, Donna C. "Jerome C. Berryman" ..... Spring, 2006
"Notes on 'The Jerks" ..... Spring, 2007

**O**

"Our Washington Letter" ..... Spring, 2005

**R**

Ransford, Charles O. "Methodism in Livingstone County" ..... Fall, 2005
"Methodism in Howard County" ..... Spring, 2006
"Methodism in Northwest Misssouri" ..... Spring, 2007
"The Kansas City Missionary Society" ..... Spring, 2008
Reece, Carolyn, "A Methodist Medical Missionary to Missouri" ..... Spring, 2006
Robinson, John M. III, "Proud of Our Past and Looking ForwardTo Our Future" Fall, 2008

**S**

Shearer, Ann Brookshire, "This is Life" ..... Spring, 2003
"Some Notes on the Potosi Church" ..... Spring, 2008

**T**

Thogmorton, Cathy, "The Story of Central" ..... Fall, 2004
"The Methodist Connection" ..... Fall, 2004
"The Evolving Campus" ..... Fall, 2004
'Timeline of Central's History" ..... Fall, 2004
"Trinity United Methodist Church, Kansas City" ..... Fall, 2005

**V**

Varnado, "Lake Creek Camp Meeting" ..... Fall, 2006

**W**

Ward, A. Sterling, "Early Methodism in Northeast Missouri" ..... Spring, 2008
Williams, Larry, "The Missouri-Mozambique Conferences Covenant: The First Decade, 1988 – 1997 ..... Spring, 2003
Woodward, Ralph L., Jr., "Ralph L. Woodward: Missouri Methodist Leader" Fall, 2007